The Decoration
By Yu May and Jezebeth Noir

[Content warning: this story depicts scenes of physical torture. Based on the world and characters created by @Astraltower for "The First Vampire."]

It was a cool evening in the northern fortress of Queen Deruela. A brown-skinned elven beauty, wearing a form-fitting fishnet top and decorative leather straps that marked her as the Captain of the Guard, led two bare-footed handmaidens into the chamber by leashes attached to their leather collars. The maids were dressed in formal, if somewhat revealing, black and white uniforms, with low cut tops and miniskirts. They wore shackles on their ankles and wrists, but without chains. The guard unclipped the leather cords that bound them. As the guard spun the maids around, she patted them both on the behinds. With a soft giggle, the two maids bent forward and lifted their skirts. The guard tightened her grip on the two leash cords, eyeing the two bottoms before her. “This entire floor needs to be spotless before Queen Deruela arrives for the Council of War. And if I find so much as a speck of dust…”

Expertly, the guard snapped the two cords like whips, aiming a lash across each at one of the maid’s backsides. “...then woe betide you!”

“Ooooh! Yes, yes, yes, Mistress Neviya!” squeaked both of the maids, still holding their position obediently.

Neviya snapped the cords taut between her hands, and yawned. “I must admit, you two have finally learned to be submissive housemaids. I had my doubts, but I suppose your training as demon hunters must have instilled you with some discipline.”

“Thank you for spanking us, Mistress Neviya,” said the first maid, her blue hair bobbing as she nodded assent.

The second maid, with long, black hair, twisted to look over her shoulder, bowing her head meekly. “We are grateful for the opportunity to serve Queen Deruela, even if only as lowly housemaids.”

“Then you may stand.”

Snickering, the two maids stood and turned, before a woman’s shrill cry cut through the air above them. The two maids stiffened at the sight.

Attached to the throne by a chain and collar was a draconid maiden with smoke colored hair. With a snarl, the dragon-girl exhaled fire which rose to engulf an iron cage that hung above the throne room.

There was another scream, and when the fire dissipated, they saw a tall woman with long blond hair, flailing inside the cage. Apart from angry, red burn marks, she was otherwise pale-skinned, and had a curvy, hourglass figure. As she kicked up her heels to her chest, her breasts bounced with each fluid motion.

The first maid's eyes went wide. She had seen the woman in the cage many times before, but only now did it occur to her how strange it was that she was still alive. "Who is that woman?"

"Oh, just the draconid. She's an amusing pet."

The first maid shook her head. "No! The woman in the cage!"

The second maid blinked. "Oh, yeah, I always wondered what the deal with that was."

Neviya glanced at the cage. The iron bars were now red-hot, and there was the distinct sizzling sound as the woman danced in place, unable to escape. "Oh, that's merely a decoration. You needn't concern yourself with it. Just give it a dusting once in a while."

The first maid looked at the trapped woman with sympathy. "But…*why* is that woman being roasted alive?"

The second maid stroked her chin. "Hmm, I heard a rumor that she was once a lesser vampire who served under Rusalka, before she defected to our side. Queen Deruela magnanimously forgave her. But at some point. I suppose the poor fool did something or other to displease Queen Deruela–yeeeek!"

Neviya pinched both maids by their ears, and bent low to whisper. "That *thing* is a decoration. You are forbidden to speak with it. If you don't want to earn yourselves a whipping, try to think of that cage as a piece of furniture. If Lady Carmilla catches you speaking to the decoration, it will be more than all our hides are worth. In fact…"

Neviya pulled out a stool and patted her lap. "...I'd better give you two a good drubbing, so you won't forget. Each of you, get across one of my knees."

"Yes, mistress!" The two maids bowed, and quickly settled themselves into position, bottoms up.

As Neviya began to spank the two mewling maids, she barked with stern authority. "Remember, Queen Deruela's word is law. You are not to talk to the decorations. In fact, I don't want you so much as *thinking* about the decoration. Just dust it off, then right back to your duties. Understood?"

The maids wriggled, twisting their legs and rubbing their feet in a desperate effort to stay obediently in position. "Yes, mistress! Thank you for spanking us!" answered both at once.

Then both maids started to cry softly, though the sweet quality of their voices suggested they were not overly bothered by the spanking. Their adorable squeals merged seamlessly with the screams of the woman in the cage. “Kyaaa! Waaaaah!”

High above in the cage, the decoration, once known as the vampire Anastasia, blinked back tears to watch the scene unfold, as Neviya gave the two maids a sound spanking. *“Why…why do they act like I don’t exist?”* thought Anastasia.

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Anastasia remembered lying on Queen Deruela’s bed, bound and gagged, as the Vampire Queen nipped her. “Hmmm, you taste nice, girl...How about another bite?”

Anastasia struggled to speak behind her gag, but her moan was an unmistakable, “Yes!”

Deruela licked a trickle of blood from the bitemark on Anastasia’s flesh. “You've never shared a bed with someone else before? Such a sad life...Too bad most of our kind die without having known the true pleasure of life. The pleasure you shall enjoy from now on...if you renounce Rusalka and become my slave... "

Anastasia’s eyes shone bright. “Hmmmmph!”

“Hehe, good girl. Now, another bite at your boobs–Or do you want me to stop punishing you?"

Anastasia shivered with pleasure as she felt the next nip at her nipple.

Then, another woman’s whiny voice interrupted. Carmilla, the First Bride of Deruela, was restrained in a X-shaped cross, her dark rouge-pink hair tumbling down, perfectly framing her bare torso. “Please! Master! Punish me as well!"

Deruela sighed. "I *am* punishing you, Carmilla. I'm still very, very annoyed at you. So, for quite a while, I shall bed someone else, while you shall be kept like that. Feel free to watch though."

Carmilla shook her head, wailing like a spoiled girl: "MASTER!!! AHHHH–"

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For weeks, Anastasia had enjoyed Deruela’s company nightly, before finally daring to hope that she might be made a favored bride of the Queen. As a servant of Rusulka, Anastasia had already had a taste of rising in the ranks to achieve power. If only she could offer Deruela some sort of grand token of appreciation…a gift worthy of a Queen?

As Anastasia strolled the gardens, she spotted a group of servants standing in a circle, with their faces against the trunk of a thick oak tree. *“How odd?”* thought Anastasia. As she

approached, she noticed an adult slave with black hair, bent over the lap of a much younger girl. The girl had her green hair styled in two pony tails, much like Deruella, and wore a simple white dress. Then there was a resounding smack, and Anastasia realized the girl was merrily spanking the slave. “Naughty, naughty! You know better than to say bad words in front of Mommy! Now, Mommy has to spank you!”

The slave groaned and grunted, but the little girl seemed determined to make a lasting impact. “Mommy hopes this spanking is teaching you a lesson. Are you sorry yet?”

The slave wailed as she felt a flurry of furious spanks. “Yes! I’m sorry, Mommy!”

The girl patted the slave’s bottom. “Good girl. Mommy forgives you. Now go stand in timeout with your sisters. And no rubbing your naughty little bottom, or you’ll get more spankies!”

“Sigh…yes, Mommy.” The slave pouted and lifted herself off the little girl’s lap.

Anastasia cleared her throat to announce herself, and strolled into the garden. “What goes on here?”

The green-haired girl hopped to her feet. “Oh! Lady Deruela gave me some of my favorite girls to be my friends to play house with. They are the children, and I am the mommy!”

“Lady Deruela? You mean Queen Deruela. You mustn’t neglect to use her proper title!”

The little girl’s eyes went wide. “Ooh! You’re right. She asks me to call her Lady Deruela when it’s reading time, but Queen Deruela everywhere else. Thank you, I forgot!”

Anastasia took a closer look at the girl, and recognized her necklace as bearing the royal sigil of Queen Deruela, a mark of her personal protection. “Who are you? Are you…a concubine of Queen Deruela?”

The girl giggled. “No, silly! I’m Talila. I’m not a concubine! She calls me a…” Talila turned to the slaves standing in timeout. “...Hold on, what is the word for what I am?”

“You are the Royal Ward of Queen Deruela,” answered the black-haired slave, neutrally.

Talila nodded. “Yes, that’s right! Queen Deruela says that I’m to be a Royal Lady, one day soon…Hey! Hold on!”

In a huff, Talila rounded on the slave and smacked her bottom. “You know you’re not supposed to talk in timeout! It’s against the rules!”

The slave only tensed slightly. “Yes, Mommy. I’m sorry for my stupidity. Please, spank me soundly, to teach me better.”

Talila shrugged, and patted the slave's bottom. "Ok. Mommy forgives you. I will give you your spanking after I say goodbye to the Queen's new wife."

Anastasia felt her chest swell at hearing herself referred to as Deruela's wife. "Why, thank you. I am The Lady Anastasia. But you may just call me Anastasia."

"Would you like to be my Mommy?"

"Excuse me?"

Talila gestured to the slaves standing in timeout. "For a game of house! It's an easy game. The girls do something naughty, and the Mommy spanks them, to teach them to do better. I'm usually the Mommy, but I'd like to be one of the daughters sometimes. You can just pretend to spank me, but Queen Deruela says it's okay to spank the slaves for any reason."

Anastasia smiled. "I would be honored to be your mother."

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Anastasia was thrilled. So had prepared something special to please Queen Deruela: a daughter. Once she had given Talila the gift of vampirism, the royal ward would forever remain as she was now, an adorable, precocious girl.

As Deruela entered their bedchamber, Anastasia leapt to her feet. "I have a surprise for you! To honor the anniversary of my entering your service…"

Anastasia held Talia by the shoulders, nudging her forward. Talila's face was pale, her eyes unblinking.

Anastasia brushed Talila's cheek gently, and bent low to kiss her. "...This shall be our first child! She's the perfect age. We shall both be her mother, for all eternity, raising her as our–"

Deruela slapped Anastasia across the face. "Foolish wench! That is *my* Royal Ward! I didn't give you permission to create a thrall!"

"But…I created loyal servants for Lord Rusulka all the time! I thought–"

"I didn't bring you to my bedchamber because I wanted you to think. Rusulka was a fool, making armies of lesser vampires. I raise up a new vampire only when I deem it the right time. But you? You've taken liberties. You dared to touch my ward! Dared to break my favorite toy! Dared to harm this girl, who will never grow up now!"

Anastasia stammered, and dropped to her knees, hugging Talila tight. “I…I never meant any harm. Talila is such a wonderful child. I loved her so much, that I thought she should stay like this forever! I thought we could love her…together!”

Deruella looked down at Anastasia with disgust. “That’s another thing…you dared to think of yourself as my first wife? I was already getting bored of you. But in your hubris, you sought to claim sole possession of me, your Goddess.”

“I…I’m so sorry, Mistress!”

Deruela’s eyes were empty. “No. You’re not sorry. Not yet.”

The cage had been fashioned for Anastasia that evening. After she was stuffed inside, it had been sealed shut, without a door. Then the cage was raised by a chain to dangle over a fire pit, and Anastasia’s ordeal began.

As a vampire, she was immortal. No humble fire could kill her, but as the bars grew hot, she had just enough room to dance.

Anastasia wailed, and forced herself to reach through the iron bars, desperately waving to Deruella. “Please! I won’t do it again!”

But Deruella didn’t even look at her.

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Days turned into weeks.

After kicking her feet endlessly, Anastasia grew so tired, she couldn’t move her legs, and could only stand, the soles of her feet and palms of her hands burning, before she finally lacked the strength to stand. The moment she sat down, she recoiled at the burning touch of the metal, before succumbing fully to her exhaustion. The cage was so tight, she did not have enough space to lie down, and was forced to squat. As she pressed her weight down fully on her plump buttocks, they sizzled exactly like two juicy hams roasting over the fire. After a few hours, Anastasia gained a second wind, then sprang back to her feet.

Then weeks turned into months.

Court painters and artisans who visited the castle of Deruella often noted the strange decoration that overhung her throne room, and the eternally dancing woman trapped within. Anastasia was even depicted in the woven tapestry that decorated one of the castle walls. The artist had emphasized the dancer’s agony, and given her a prominent place in the composition. Today, Anastasia was sitting slumped in her burning cage, her buttocks sizzling beneath her. Even vampires needed to sleep.

Deruella gave strict instructions that the fire should always be kept low. If Anastasia was ever burned to the point of scarring, the fire would be lowered again, but never allowed to die out. Then Anastasia's vampiric healing would restore her flesh to its original state.

The first few sleepless weeks in the cage had come closer to killing her than the heat ever could, but when exhaustion from her endless dance finally overtook her, she collapsed and entered her first, fitful sleep. Fortunately, when vampires sleep, they enter a state like death, without dreams, nor any feeling. So whenever Anastasia finally managed to fall asleep, she could at least stay asleep for a few weeks. But by the time she woke up, her back and buttocks, and whatever flesh was touching the iron cage, was always fried to the color of a crisp, juicy, red apple. Then she would leap to her feet, and begin her dance again, and her vampiric gift would slowly heal the burned flesh.

Anastasia felt a staff prodding her awake, and spotted two women. She recognized the first woman as Lady Carmilla, First Wife of Queen Deruella. Without a word, Carmilla began to prod the coals beneath the cage, to stoke the fire.

The second was an elven woman clad in a green loincloth and bikini armor, which perfectly matched the color of her hair. Anastasia didn't recognize the second woman at first, but something about her was strikingly familiar. "Talila?"

The unknown lady shook her head, strolling around the cage to stand behind Anastasia. "No. I'm Solana. Talila is my little sister. And thanks to you, she'll be my little sister for all eternity now. I won't get to see her grow up."

Anastasia recoiled from the bars as she felt the heat slowly rising around her. "I…I only thought–"

Solana pulled a thorny whip from her side and lashed it expertly, aiming a diagonal stroke across Anastasia's lower back and upper buttocks. "No excuses. No apologies. No words will ever undo what you did. You're just like Rusulka."

With a whoop, Anastasia jumped up, and began her foolish dance. It wasn't so much a proper dance as a futile effort to avoid touching any of the hot metal bars for too long. Sometimes, when the fire was low, Anastasia could manage to get a few seconds of relief. But then the slaves would kindle a stronger fire, and there would be no escape.

Anastasia felt tears in her eyes. "I'm sorry! I never wanted to work for Rusulka! She turned me against my will!"

Carmilla waved her hand, and there was a flash of eerie light. Suddenly, Anastasia felt herself being yanked back against the hot metal of the cage, as if she was held in place by invisible hands. Carmilla reached through the bars and stroked her long, pointed nails along Anastasia's

exposed breasts. “Now, Solana, you really shouldn’t bother talking to this *thing*. After all, it’s not capable of repentance. It’s not really sorry. It only feels sorry for itself.”

Anastasia shook her head. “No! I am sorry! Truly! I regret–”

Carmilla dug her nails into Anastasia’s flesh, slowly tracing long, thin scratches along her breasts. “Why not try aiming a few stokes at its tits? It may only be a decoration, but that’s sure to provoke an entertaining reaction.”

Solana started to spiral her whip in a figure-eight pattern. “And what if I lash your hand by mistake?”

“I’m sure your aim will be true.”

Solana grinned. “So be it!”

Solana snapped the whip, and Anastasia saw everything as if the world was in slow motion, before the leather tip cracked across her exposed tit.

As Anastasia screamed, Carmilla tightened her grip, holding Anastasia’s breasts in place to make an easy target. After Solana landed the second blow across Anastasia’s other tit, the elven maid scowled. “Turn her around. I’d like to work over her fat ass.”

Carmilla sighed, clucking her tongue. “Don’t refer to the decoration as *her.* It’s not proper grammar. Queen Deruela herself has given the order. The decoration is not to be spoken to.”

The second Carmilla released her hold on Anastasia, she reactivated her magic, and spun Anastasia around in her cage, to present her backside to the whip. For a moment, Solana looked nervous at the mention of Deruela. But she quickly found her rhythm after delivering the first lash across Anastasia’s buttocks. After another 30 lashes, Solana wound up her whip. “That will do. Let it rot in its cage.”

Anastasia sniveled. “I…I’m sorry.”

Solana stiffened, before putting her whip away. “Come on, we have other prisoners to prepare for display.”

Tears spilled down Anastasia’s face. She had never exactly grown used to the pain, but after the first year of continual burning, it had started to become more like an annoying itch.

Anastasia wasn’t crying because of the fresh scars. Those would heal. She was crying because she wished they would acknowledge her words. Even a rejection of her apology would have been better than ignoring her.

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Two tamed demonesses were escorted into the chamber, and placed in pillories made of solid ice. Both had leathery wings, like bats. One had the white hair of an albino, while the other had hair the color of wheat. Their bodies were those of ordinary women, but whereas the albino was tall and slender, the blond had a plump, curvy build. Nevertheless, both had soft, shapely breasts and buttocks.

The two demonesses hissed softly as the slaves stripped them of their loincloths, but both obediently took their place. The albino demoness trembled with fear, like a cowed puppy, while the straw-haired demoness seemed eager, almost hungry for what came next.

The servants laid out a line of birch bundles for guests, who lined up to chastise the two trapped she-devils. The albino demoness whined at the sight, but the second demoness licked her lips.

As a crowd gathered to flog the two demonesses, they all passed by Anastasia's cage. As the albino demoness felt the first stroke of the birch bundle across her bottom, she writhed like a wild animal, kicking and straining at her restraints, before the birching continued.

The blond demoness snarled as she craned her neck to watch. "No! Not her! Me first!"

By the time it was over, the albino's bottom was covered in fiery red marks. The second guest in line picked up a birch bundle and continued the punishment right where the first had left off.

As the first guest strolled across the throne room to punish the second demoness, she screeched with impatience. "Yes! Punish me just like you did for her, only harder!"

As the first guest slammed the birches across her bottom, the blond demon squealed, but her voice was strangely joyful, when compared to that of her albino companion.

As Anastasia overheard the guests milling beneath her, she smiled. Although plenty of guests paused to flog the two demonesses, sooner or later, all eyes in the room fell on her.

After all, no matter how soundly the two demons were birched, their cries never had that true quality of agony and despair. There could be no imitating the pain that marked the voice of the dancer in her cage. Anastasia discovered that, in some strange, perverted way, she was proud of this fact.

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Months turned into years.

Though Anastasia's agonies never ended, they somehow became…boring. Fewer and fewer people even bothered to look at the dancer in her cage. The legend of the woman of the cage

was told, and retold, until it became a dull point of historical trivia. No one was surprised to see Anastasia anymore when they entered Queen Deruela's throne room.

Years turned into decades.

A second tapestry had been woven, to complement the first. But in the second, later tapestry, the entire cage was only given a small place in the background. The exhausted figure in the cage seemed to have been added by the artist as an afterthought. Clearly, after a century or so, Queen Deruela's infamous decoration had lost some of its lustre.

Anastasia started awake as one of the handmaidens prodded her with the end of a feather duster. As Anastasia blinked, she noticed that the maids had nearly allowed the fire to go out. Her backside only felt slightly toasty.

At that moment, Anastasia remembered the little draconic girl that used to torment her. How Anastasia had hated that little fire-breather! But the pet had been taken away weeks ago to prepare for the coming ceremony, perhaps to keep from lighting any royal guests on fire. *"Poor little thing…I hope I see it again. At least I could talk to it, even if it couldn't understand me,"* thought Anastasia.

Below her, the black-haired maid furiously added coals to the dying fire. "If anyone finds out we forgot to tend the fire last night, we might be the ones stuck in this cage!" she hissed, as she stoked the fire.

The blue-haired maid giggled as she dusted the cage, not even looking at Anastasia. "It will be fine. It is supposed to be a low fire, after all."

"Well then, I'm sure you won't mind telling Queen Deruela yourself. I'm sure she'll be thrilled."

The blue-haired maid swallowed, then pulled a tankard from her belt. "I don't think we should bother the Queen with such minor household matters. Let's just get…the decoration…ready for the triumphal celebration."

With a soft sigh, Anastasia allowed herself to be dusted. Then the blue-haired maid handed her the tankard, without looking at her. The maid kept her mouth tight shut, clearly not wanting to break the Queen's rule by mistake.

When the maids had first been brought on, Anastasia had tried to talk to them, even flirt with them, but had long ago given up on ever getting a response.

Anastasia drank the contents of the tankard: pig's blood. It was tasteless, and barely enough to satisfy her vampiric urges, but at least she wouldn't starve. As the maid took back her empty tankard, Anastasia thought about how easy it would be to grab the girl through the iron bars, and drink her blood. But Anastasia didn't feel like moving.

As both maids finished stoking the fire beneath her, Anastasia stood with a jolt, and cradled herself.

A few decades ago, she had often heard herself being referred to only as “The Dancer.” In recent years, she was only ever referred to as “the decoration,” if at all.

Her name as “The Dancer” had always been a cruel irony. Anastasia’s “dance” had only been hopping in place, kicking her knees in a desperate effort to relieve the pain. The cage barely allowed her enough range of motion to spin in a circle. But as the door opened and Queen Deruella entered, Anastasia began to dance. Not the absurd jerking and kicking of a tortured soul. But a real dance.

Carmilla strode behind Queen Deruella. “We’ve finished annexing the last of Rusulka’s strongholds, Your Majesty. After the triumph of your final campaign, all that is left is to clean up the stragglers.”

“And how is Rusulka adjusting to her new accommodations?”

“She is furious. Keeps making demands that you come and treat with her, for peace. Perhaps she’s attempting to put on a bold front, but I think she’s gone mad.”

“We’ll have to devise something special for her…something…poetic.”

Anastasia spun on her feet, ignoring the rising heat, and flourished her hands with grace that had come from decades of practice. Then the bars beneath her began to glow red, and Anastasia gave herself over, fully, to the dance. By that point, it was not as if she had a choice.

But for a moment, something caught Queen Deruella’s eye, and she glanced up, to watch Anastasia’s dance.

Carmilla blinked, not even registering the sight of the dancing woman in the cage. “Your Majesty? Is something the matter?”

Queen Deruella shook her head, and took her place on the throne. “Just admiring the decoration.”

As tears flew from Anastasia’s eyes, she continued to perform the most elegant dance of her life, every motion fluid and precise. As the hot metal pressed against the soles of her feet, she blocked out all the pain, making lively steps in time to the music played by the court musicians below. Despite the narrow confines, she managed to glide, her motions reminiscent of a bird in flight. So elegant was Anastasia’s dance, the bars seemed to be nothing to her.

But though the gathering crowd might occasionally glance at the decoration, no one watched for long.

The End